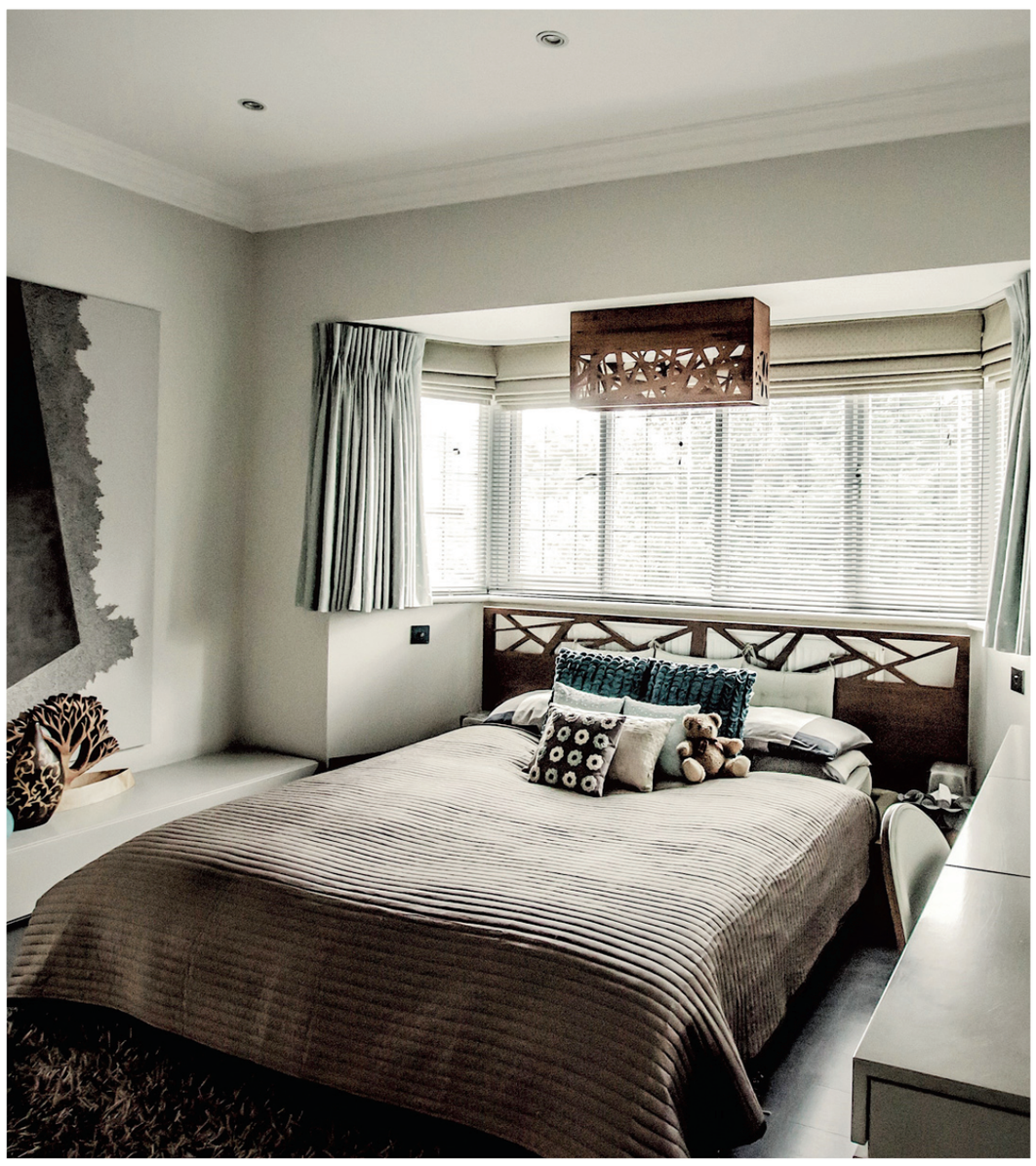






A portrait of the self



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The variety and spice that city dwellers seek while doing up their homes is fast changing the concept of 'home sweet home'.

The growing number of home owners and first time buyers have created a stir in the real-estate ancillary markets over the past few years.

New-age functionality modular concepts, contemporary designs and state-of-the-art artificial intelligence smart gadgets are all well within the grasp of the modern Indian middle-class. With a plethora of options to lure your creativity, the question now is — where and how do we begin?

Breaking the stereotype always makes a project more exciting and when budgets are limited, what we don't do is as important as what we do. Doing up your house is like building up a versatile and interesting wardrobe. You have to give it time and you cannot have it all at once.

When you plan the interiors of your space, research & budgeting are the only two real reference points which will guide you through this treacherous path strewn with potholes of make-believe standards and impractical design.

Research

Research will help you identify the design and feel that resonates most with your sense of being, keeping in mind both functionality and modern trends. Each individual's sense of style is actually a concoction of elements of various genres.

You may discover that your taste in flooring may be contemporary bamboo tiling while your choice of furniture or wall hangings may be more inclined towards archaic Victorian. For people doing this for the first time, looking through popular interior design magazines, look books and other print media is a great way to start off. One must always save images or make notes for future reference.

After the preliminary exercise one can consider graduating to more detailed and diverse digital platforms like Instagram, Pinterest and the internet.

The reason I suggest people should consider digital media at a latter stage is because of the infinite options available online. This is detrimental to the formation of a clear preliminary design identity and often derails the entire process of discovering one's true preferences.

Budgeting

In the second stage of research we have to start drawing parity with our budget. A budget is subjective in nature and will change from person to person based on their interests.

Every interior designer, consultant or enthusiast will have their own school of thought based on their experience; personally, I am of the opinion that we should draw up an interior budget based on two primary facets — immovable & movable sections.

Immovable sections comprise flooring, walls, permanent lighting, while movable sections comprise art, furniture, plants and decorative lighting. Most of this budget should be allocated to the immovable sections. This section is obviously a pre-requisite to the latter and, therefore, will take precedence.

Also going back to the earlier comparison of creating a respectable wardrobe, the best parts of the movable sections will probably be acquired over a period of time and not instantaneously.

This would include various artefacts and quirky pieces that one collects through their travels and experiences. So getting carried away and stressing on these elements may be futile, instead one should consider concentrating on the basic requirements.

Cozy corner

The budget only makes sense when we let it amalgamate with the overall layout of the space itself. There are areas of the house where we tend to spend a lot more time in comparison to others. For instance, every person has a separate concept of the cozy corner and I firmly believe that the budget and layout should also reflect that.

If one is single, married, an avid reader or a wine connoisseur, one should have a dedicated space to unwind and indulge. Accounting for such space with a reasonable degree of generosity always makes the exercise of research and budgeting a touch more interesting and also enriches your quality of life. This is a space where one can either keep a generous allocation of the budget or even consider building on bit by bit over a period of time.

Science and myth

People who follow architectural planning sciences such as Vastu or FengShui should be proactive with their layout. Moving walls and relocating toilets can be an expensive, cumbersome and time-consuming proposition. It will invariably result in time and cost overruns. Some may take comfort from the fact that several real-estate projects across all budgets have started incorporating such sciences in their architectural and structural orientation.

Colour trends

There are several myths that are being set aside today. People are not getting influenced by theories that say white makes the space look bigger and vice versa for black.

They are liberal in the selection of their colour palette and are choosing neutral colours such as greys, browns and shades that easily absorb the vibrant or definitive colours of furniture and art.

There is no cost escalation on account of colour selection so experimenting with such options have become much more viable. In my personal experience, I like to keep the palette very neutral and splash colour through art, linen and accessories.

Help at hand

Whether you choose to employ the services of a turnkey contractor, interior decorator or an interior consultant, you have to be well prepared to deal with coordination and execution difficulties.

It is hard to predict the end costs of labour intensive jobs and rectification related works. Making allowances or provisions for such incidentals is always a prudent approach.

On the other hand, for those who would rather design and execute the whole plan all by themselves or for those who are not tech-friendly, my advice would be to consider hiring a freelance digital visualiser.

Such professionals are capable of bringing your vision to life well before the actual commencement of works.

Starting point

After the research, budgeting and completion of the basic layout, one might still be left with a simple unanswered question — where do I begin? Which aspect of the home should I touch first? Well, in my experience, it works out for the better, when I start a project by selecting the wall finishes and the flooring options simultaneously. This will be helpful because these two aspects will set a theme that will cover the entire area and set the basic undertone for your space.

Simple measures

Strategically planning windows and open spaces would help you maximise the affects of natural light, breeze and the best possible view. This is essential to optimise the efficiency of air-conditioning and ventilation as well.

With the reduction in the size of columns and beams in modern day housing architecture planning, the canvas of wall space available to work with such options have significantly increased and can be utilised to the maximum. A layout which is meticulously planned at the very outset and not subject to whimsical changes, will avoid the incidence of rectification works such as exposed or capped wirings and ugly air-condition piping.

De-cluttering is another aspect that can be achieved partly by including wall coves and smart storage solutions. Coves, bays and indentations help to cut through the monotony of plain walls and can be also utilised to create space for memories, portraits, worship, collectibles and books. The presence of these niches can be further highlighted by incorporating simple fixed lighting to illuminate such spaces.

Modern amenities

There have been several advancements in various fit-outs and modular systems. This has simplified tricky sections like the kitchen and cabinets. I would highly recommend the use of modular kitchen solutions as they help us maximise space utility with their efficiently engineered hardware selection.

People have also found cost and service relief on the furniture front with the advent of several online furniture sites. These sites accurately describe their products and purchasing, where the installation and returns are all fairly hassle-free.

Smart homes

Artificial intelligence, automation, security, surveillance, connectivity and insurance are all aspects that form a part of the home budget. This is a value addition for people who like to do more with their time and have control over their home-systems right at their fingertips.

As Canadian journalist and critic Carl Honore says, "Technology enables us to work every minute of every day from any place on the planet."

Product related information, specifications and costs are all available online. There is great diversity in all these products and most of them can be tailor-made or customised as well. These can all be considered in the second phase of budgeting and planning. These products are generally available on equitable monthly instalments (EMIs).

Your story

As the American interior designer & stylist Nate Berkus rightly said, "Your home should tell the story of who you are and the collection of what you love."

Through my experiences working with people across the world I have come to realise that there is never a day where we truly complete our homes. It is in reality a picture of us, on the canvas of time that we constantly strive to finish but seldom do.